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ABSTRACT

Australia's system for helping youths make a successful transition from initial vocational education and training (VET) to working life was assessed through an analysis that focused on the following features that were identified by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as contributing to successful transitions: learning pathways and qualifications frameworks; learning in real work settings; provision of a broad range of general and vocational skills; "youth-friendly" labor markets; safety nets and reintegration; information and guidance; effective institutional frameworks; and monitoring tools. The following were identified as being among Australia's significant achievements in establishing a system to support successful transitions from VET to working life: establishment of the Australian Qualifications framework; active engagement of industry in development of competency standards; and efforts to increase learners' participation in real work settings through the New Apprenticeships and VET in Schools programs. The issues identified as being among the five most significant remaining to be addressed were: developing effective programs for identifying potential dropouts and reintegrating dropouts into the educational system; developing integrated approaches to career guidance; improving opportunities for learning in real work settings; and taking steps to ensure that existing structures and frameworks serve the interests of both learners and employers. (MN)

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The transition from initial education to working life

A Status Report on Australia's progress

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Preamble

In 1998 the OECD issued an Interim Comparative Report entitled *Transition from initial education to working life*. This report is a Thematic Review on six countries (including Australia) that were visited by OECD teams during 1997. It defines eight "features" that appear to contribute to successful transitions from initial education to working life. These features relate to:

1. Learning pathways and qualifications frameworks
2. Learning in real work settings
3. Provision of a broad range of general and vocational skills
4. "Youth friendly" labour markets
5. Safety nets and reintegration
6. Information and guidance
7. Effective institutional frameworks
8. Monitoring tools.

As part of ANTA's continuing work on post-compulsory education and training, this report takes each of the eight "features" and reports on their status in Australia in late 1999. The Status Report is a first step in a major examination of the transitions relating to education, training and work that young people undergo. It examines Australia's current status against the eight features defined by the OECD, identifies opportunities for improvement and suggests further strategic policy and structural developments.

The main achievements

It should be acknowledged that having reached the current level of system development is a significant achievement. Considerable progress has been made, given the changes in attitudes and structures that have been required. The structures and frameworks now in place position Australia well for the next phase of development.

Particular achievements that are worthy of note are:

- the establishment of the Australian Qualifications Framework, which provides the basis for seamless transitions for learners throughout their lifetime;
- the collective commitment by Australian governments, in partnership with industry, to the development of a coherent framework for policy and programs, that has been achieved through the establishment of the Australian National Training Authority, the National Training Framework and the National Strategy for VET;
- the active engagement of industry in developing competency standards to be used in Training Packages;
- the increased movement, in both directions, between VET and universities;
- the increased participation of learners in real work settings, through New Apprenticeships and VET in Schools;
- the refinement of data systems to help in monitoring the performance of the system.

Feature 1.
Learning pathways and qualification frameworks

Clearly defined, well organised, open and coherent learning pathways and qualifications frameworks are the first feature identified by the OECD Thematic Review as being important for ensuring young people have successful transitions from their initial education to working life. Access to education and training, and also to work, is pivotal to the ability to learn throughout life. The OECD Review identifies "separate entry requirements" and "separate qualifications structures" in the different education sectors as pitfalls to be avoided.

Australian policy and structural achievements

In order for people to learn throughout life, they need to be able to weave in and out of education and training and to build on their education, training and work experiences. Australia's qualification framework gives individuals access to a coherent set of qualifications through a variety of learning pathways.

- The Australian Qualifications Framework, agreed by Ministers in 1995, established a common framework that provides a clear definition of levels for certificates, diplomas and degrees across all education sectors, and allows for the national recognition of skills.
- The Australian Recognition Framework (in the VET sector) has been designed to ensure that training providers comply with quality standards.
- The National Training Framework, through the development of Training Packages, New Apprenticeships and VET in Schools, provides for the national recognition of qualifications and assists in the transfer of learners from one sector to another.

The policies and structures currently in place have the potential to lead, in the OECD's words, to a "well-organised" education system.

The current situation

The open and coherent nature of Australia's VET system has broadened access to opportunities for learning throughout life. Indications of this achievement can be seen in the following ways:

- Training packages currently cover approximately 58% of the workforce and are extending the opportunities for structured training into new industries.
- Movement from VET to university now comprises 11% of university enrolments, an increase of 63% over five years.
- An increasing number of people are enrolling in VET courses after graduation from university: 76 000 in 1997, an increase of 45% over the previous year.
- A rapidly increasing number of post-compulsory aged school students are engaging in VET programs as an integral part of their final years of school.

Building a "well-organised" system

Now that the qualification framework for vocational education and training is in place, further challenges must be addressed to achieve the "well-organised" education system advocated by the OECD.

To reach this goal, transitions between sectors will need to be as effective as they are within VET. One significant transition occurs between school and VET. With the availability of VET subjects in secondary schools it may be necessary to develop procedures enabling these studies to be counted towards a tertiary entrance score, without making VET courses subservient to the grading requirements of general education subjects. It has been suggested in some States that an additional examination or tasks might be offered to those who wish to have their VET work graded. A national approach to how VET in Schools can be counted towards a tertiary entrance score is highly desirable and will require action by the VET sector, the universities and Boards of Studies.

Another significant transition occurs between university and VET. A joint ANTA/AVCC project is currently underway and should lead to the development of a credit transfer framework between VET and university qualifications. The project will also develop specific proposals for transition arrangements for five Training Packages. While projects such as this are addressing cross-sectoral issues, transition for many learners is currently far from seamless. It will be important for ANTA to monitor transfers between sectors to see whether the credit transfer framework developed results in more effective transitions.

Transition between sectors is particularly important for those learners who previously had limited access to the full range of educational experiences, but effective transition arrangements alone are not enough. For individuals and enterprises to benefit from the available learning pathways and qualifications framework they need to understand how to access and use them. Considerable effort has created a robust and comprehensive qualifications framework that addresses the National Strategy objectives of "equipping Australians for the world of work" and "enhancing mobility in the labour market", as agreed by the ANTA Ministerial Council. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that the scale and pace of change has left some learners and employers without the necessary information to realise these benefits. The current ANTA Marketing Strategy is providing an opportunity to develop an approach for improving learners' and enterprises' awareness and acceptance of the systems in place.

Building a quality system

For an education system to be clearly defined and coherent the value of qualifications needs to be assured through effective quality processes. While an early evaluation of four Training Packages indicated acceptable consistency between qualifications at the same level, the Training Package review and continuous improvement processes will be used to monitor the level of consistency with the AQF descriptors for qualifications levels. ANTA is also discussing with State Training Authorities a number of approaches to ensure a robust system of quality assurance. These include:

- a stocktake of current audit work;
- sharing information on evaluations in progress;
- the development of risk-management approaches to ensure that the resources needed to monitor providers are used most effectively;

- consideration of how industry is best involved in the monitoring or auditing of providers; and
- the development of measures to enhance cooperation between stakeholders and agreement on the appropriate level of consistency.

Feature 2.
Learning in real work settings

This feature concerns the availability of extensive opportunities for young people to participate and learn in real work settings while they are students. The OECD identified these opportunities as important to avoid the undesirable eventuality of large numbers of early school leavers in low skilled work that is not linked to education and training.

Australian policy and structural achievements

The VET sector has traditionally had a distinctive mission to provide opportunities for students to participate in work-based training. The implementation of the National Training Framework has strengthened this role by providing:

- New Apprenticeships that build on the strengths of Australia's traditional apprenticeship system, but with significant improvements in flexibility, relevance and outcomes.
- VET in Schools, including New Apprenticeships in schools, to expand the pathways and options for all secondary school students.
- Training Packages in VET in Schools programs that explicitly recognise the value of learning in the workplace and provide for national recognition and portability of skills. Training Packages also make qualification pathways more easily understood and accessible.

VET in Schools has been advanced by the following Ministerial agreements:

- MCEETYA agreement to support VET in Schools (nationally recognised programs include work placement);
- MINCO agreement to Principles and Guidelines for improving VET in Schools, which has received $80M of Commonwealth funds over four years; and
- MINCO agreement that students who undertake part time apprenticeships and traineeships while at school should be subject to the same processes as New Apprenticeships in general.

In the area of industrial relations, however, there is still some adjustment needed to Federal and State awards or Agreements to enable employment in qualification areas that have previously not been accessible by apprentices/trainees. This has been substantially progressed over the past few months with particular emphasis on the National Training Wage Award, which includes part-time and casual apprenticeships for the first time.

The current situation

Achievements in Australia's VET system during the last few years have seen learning in real work settings advance considerably:

- In 1998, 117 000 students were enrolled in a VET in Schools program, and about half of these were involved in work placements. Funding to the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation in particular has been instrumental in providing support for schools to create local partnerships with industry to develop training in real work settings.
- Participation in workplace learning appears to have increased by around 40% over the two years 1997 and 1998. It is expected that as school programs link with Training Packages there will be increased demand for work placement for both delivery and assessment.
- In 1998, apprenticeships and traineeships exceeded 200 000 for the first time; however, the participation rate for 15-19 year olds increased only marginally – from 5.7% to 6.2% over the last three years (although there was a greater increase for 20-24 year olds).

Success stories in developing innovative local networks of industry with schools can be seen in Australian Student Traineeship Foundation programs and networks of workplace and vocational coordinators. For example, Queensland's SunVetNetwork provides a range of services, including information sharing and joint promotion of workplace learning.

Practice firms, established in 1995 with the support of Federal and State governments, also provide opportunities for work-based learning for young people in simulated business environments. The Australian Network of Practice Firms (ANPF) promotes and supports simulated businesses that are set up and run by students to prepare them for working in a real business environment. A mentor from industry provides advice, support and feedback to students on the progress of their business. The ANPF has 56 operational practice firms currently and plans to reach a target of 200 practice firms by the year 2000.

However, while partnerships between local chambers of commerce, employer groups, enterprises, schools and communities are providing structural support to workplace learning, to date these have been developed on an ad hoc basis. Further work is needed to integrate and co-ordinate implementation strategies.

Increasing learning in work settings

To increase access for young people to learn in work settings it is necessary to further examine:

- reasons for the wide differences between States in terms of placing people in structured workplace learning, and the requirements of VET programs;
- why a significant proportion of apprentices and trainees fail to complete their training;
- lessons learned from the DETYA School to Work Program; and
- ways of providing long-term support for schools and communities to develop and maintain extensive opportunities for young people to participate and learn in real work settings.

As well as enabling more students to participate, a key to success will be ensuring that the workplace activities are meaningful in terms of the length of time (currently very short for many students) and the quality of experience. This is a key challenge.

A number of forums and initiatives are currently considering these issues, including:

- the Rural Industries Forum (being progressed under the ANTA CEOs);
- the taskforce on integrated collaborative strategies to improve employment, education, training and children's services in rural and remote Australia (chaired by South Australia); and
- the initiatives of the Australian Network of Practice Firms.

To achieve further progress it will also be necessary to work toward better integration of Commonwealth, State/Territory and ANTA activity in the development of structural and program support for VET in Schools.

Feature 3.
Provision of a broad range of general and vocational skills

The third feature identified by the OECD focuses on the combination of skills needed by young people not initially continuing into higher education. This feature emphasises the need to provide vocational and technical skills together with general education and personal skills. Specific dangers to avoid are general education programs that provide neither occupational qualifications nor skills and motivation for further education; and vocational curricula that focus on narrowly defined occupations and contain limited general education subjects.

Australian policy and structural achievements

The most significant development in this area is that States' and Territories' Boards of Studies, through the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authority (ACACA), have agreed to integrate the National Training Framework into their secondary certificates. This has the potential to provide expanded opportunities for all students (not only the 70% who do not progress to higher education) to gain:

- access to multiple pathways to education, training and employment;
- recognised training in programs based on national industry standards; and
- dual outcomes – senior secondary certificate and VET qualification under the AQF.

Structures and agreements that have supported these developments are:

- the establishment of the MCEETYA Task Force on VET in Schools;
- the Common and Agreed Goals for Schooling that provide students with access to a range of VET programs as part of their schooling; and
- the Principles and Guidelines for improving outcomes for VET in Schools that work to ensure flexibility, accountability and accessibility in the development of a broad range of vocational skills for young people.

The principal aim of these reforms is to support vocational education programs in schools delivered as part of a broad, general education and to combine study towards a senior certificate with nationally recognised vocational education and training. The reforms work toward combating the OECD-identified pitfall of low levels of attainment and qualifications among young people.

TAFE Institutes also offer a combination of general and vocational skills. Some general subjects are provided as a "second chance" at a senior certificate and in preparation for tertiary courses. Currently 20% of TAFE enrolments are in the "multi-field" category of general education.

The development of the Mayer Key Competencies in the early 1990s resulted from recognition of the importance of generic skills within all education and training. The Mayer Key Competencies have been identified in all Training Packages and have also influenced school curricula.

Policy implementation has generally assumed that, within the VET system, there is a large body of professionals who have the ability to structure learning and support students in ways that enable them to learn throughout life. Traditionally, TAFE teachers received less professional training in how to teach than school teachers. This was remedied in the mid-1980s by the establishment of diploma and degree programs that became the norm for permanent teachers, and by the injection of Commonwealth funds to support staff development.

The current situation

The development of VET in Schools has, for the first time, worked toward breaking down the highly academic nature of the curriculum in Years 11 and 12 and offers a diverse range of educational experiences to all students, particularly those who are not likely to proceed to higher education.

Key achievements are:

- Participation of secondary students undertaking some form of vocational education and training within their senior secondary certificate has risen from 16% in 1996 to 32% in 1999.
- The number of schools providing VET in Schools programs has risen from 70% in 1997 to 84% in 1999.
- By December 1998, approximately 1590 Training Agreements for part-time New Apprenticeships in Schools were signed and projections for 1999 are for more than 4800. While this is a significant growth in participation, it should be remembered that it represents only a small percentage (approx. 1.2%) of the total Year 11 and 12 projected enrolments.

These levels of participation by learners mean that for a large number of young people there are now genuine opportunities to obtain a mixture of general and vocational skills. Employer participation in the VET in Schools programs, however, needs to be strengthened.

Despite the injection of Commonwealth funds for TAFE staff development and the establishment of diploma and degree programs for TAFE teachers, there is less commitment to this level of training by training providers. On the other hand, the professionalism with which industry-based training is delivered has been aided by the development of national competency standards for workplace trainers and assessors. The ANTA-funded "Framing the Future" project is a major staff development initiative that promotes the use of work-based learning. It has so far provided funding for 340 staff development projects, and has involved 11 000 participants.

Seeking a better balance

To maximise the benefits that learners obtain from a balanced combination of vocational and general education some current concerns need to be addressed. There is a widely-held view that the importance of underpinning knowledge, generic competencies and work-readiness skills are not sufficiently emphasised in Training Packages to ensure that they form the basis of training as it is delivered. This is a vital issue as overseas experience has testified to the importance of such knowledge and skills – both in terms of productivity and in terms of the ability to adapt to changing work roles. Connected with this is a suspicion among employers regarding the capacity of school teachers (most of whom have not worked in any other industry) to teach vocational skills.

To address these concerns it will be necessary to investigate whether:

- Training Packages give sufficient emphasis to the importance of underpinning knowledge to ensure that it forms the basis of all education and training; and
- Mayer Key Competencies are sufficiently emphasised in Training Packages, and whether in future these might be extended to ensure that all VET graduates have well-developed work-readiness skills for which employers have identified a need.

High quality delivery

A further concern focuses on whether teachers and trainers in VET are sufficiently equipped to provide learners with the structure and sequencing needed for skill development. This is exacerbated by the extent to which teaching is carried out by casual staff who often have little or no training in this area. An inquiry focussing initially on the experiences of Victoria's development of competencies for VET professionals may identify ways of ensuring that the teaching and training capacity of VET professionals is adequate.

Feature 4.
"Youth friendly" labour markets

"Youth friendly" labour markets are identified by the OECD Thematic Review as the fourth element required for young people to make a successful transition from initial education to working life.

The two key aspects of "youth friendly" labour markets are:

- wage regulations and employment protection arrangements that do not systematically put young people at a disadvantage in the labour market; and
- incentives and agreements that encourage both employers and young people to invest in skill formation and further learning.

Australian policy and structural achievements

Historically, Australia's labour market cannot be characterised as "youth friendly". In the past 25 years young people have been faced with higher rates of unemployment than other Australians have. Where young people do find employment there is an extremely high probability that they will work in either part-time and/or casual positions. They also tend to be concentrated in only a few industries, with more than half working in the retail sector. While the increases in school retention rates and educational participation at the tertiary level are good news, this increase in educational participation occurred after youth unemployment figures began to rise, suggesting that education and training figures may be masking the true number of young unemployed persons.

Government policies that endeavour to make the labour market more youth friendly include:

- New Apprenticeships – increasing the number and variety of structured work and training arrangements available to young people looking to enter the labour market;
- support for New Apprenticeship arrangements through appropriate wage arrangements in industrial awards and agreements;
- the addition of a further 2200 places under the Job Placement, Employment and Training (JPET) Program; and
- permanent retention of age-based youth wages.

In addition, the Federal Government has recognised the need to provide young people with relevant work opportunities before they leave the education system. One goal for VET in Schools participation is that all young people experience "vocational learning" while at school.

The current situation

Outcomes in this area are somewhat mixed. There has been growth in the numbers of young people in New Apprenticeships, and the recent ruling by the Industrial Relations Commission supports the need for junior wage rates to be retained with the Commission stating that "junior rates are inherently conducive to youth employment." However youth unemployment remains high, the employment opportunities available to young people are still narrow and many young people have a negative view of further participation in education.

In the three years from 1995 to 1998, the growth in participation of 15 to 19 year olds in apprenticeships and traineeships exceeded population growth for this age cohort. The participation rate for 20 to 24 year olds also increased steadily, from 3.8% in 1995 to 5.4% in 1998. However, during this period, growth in participation in apprenticeships and traineeships was greatest for persons aged over 24 years.

The bleaker side of the picture comes from the most recent ABS Survey of Education and Training, which revealed that almost 45 per cent of 15-19 year olds in Australia who are not studying state that "nothing" would encourage them to do so.

Creating "youth friendly" labour markets

Valuable as they are, education and training opportunities are insufficient on their own. Many young people are looking for employment opportunities, not

education. Ultimately, the challenge is to achieve a better "fit" between the needs of young people and the employment and training opportunities that are available to them. While the importance of education and training should continue to be promoted to young people, it is crucial to recognise their reality. For some this includes a preference for employment opportunities ahead of continued participation in education.

Given that so many young people are involved in part-time work during school, there may be scope to more closely link young people's experience of part-time work with education and training for future careers. To strengthen this link it will be important to analyse data on the ways in which employers and individuals perceive the value of training.

It will also be necessary to resolve negotiations around part-time New Apprenticeships in Schools and their relationship to industrial relations, legislation, workers compensation and insurance. This can be pursued through the continuation of the facilitated work on adjustment to Federal Awards and Agreements, and the bilateral process to assist State and Territory jurisdictions' work with the parties and determining bodies.

Offering incentives for employers to employ and train young people may impact on the creation of youth friendly labour markets. For this reason the effects of current Australian practice need to be examined. In some European countries the onus is on employers to prove the success of their efforts to train young apprentices and trainees. The views of Australian employers on how incentives could be more outcome-based would usefully inform the development of arrangements that work toward the provision of youth friendly labour markets.

Feature 5.
Safety nets and reintegration

The fifth feature identified by the OECD Thematic Review emphasised the need for tightly knit safety nets that reintegrate those young people who are most at risk of social and economic exclusion into mainstream education and training. The OECD also identified a number of possible factors that can make it difficult for early school leavers to find a pathway back into education. These include the absence of individualised assistance for young people experiencing difficulties in the labour market, and a lack of financing mechanisms to encourage them to return to organised learning.

Reforms in Australia have meant that we now have the best-educated young people ever, but a bad start can affect people for a long time. For this reason the focus should be not only on reintegrating young people who drop out back into education and training, but also on helping young people *before* they leave the system. We also need to acknowledge that for some people "reintegration" into education and training may not be the best option at that stage of their lives. For many young people, transition at this point into meaningful full-time employment can provide stability and guidance, leaving them the option of re-entering education and training later in life.

Australian policy and structural achievements

Australia's greatest achievement in promoting young people's reintegration into education and training is the flexibility of the education system. In Australia, individuals are not locked into specific streams of study early in life. Instead, schools, VET, adult and community education and higher

education allow easy access to further study if the individual's initial choice was not successfully pursued – a situation that is better than in many other countries. This is particularly important, given the fluid, non-linear pathways that are followed by many young people.

A key factor in preventing people from prematurely leaving education and training is financial support. In 1998, the government introduced the new Youth Allowance, which replaced most income support payments to young people (including AUSTUDY) and was introduced to address the changing youth labour market. This has improved flexibility, decreased confusion over payment and removed disincentives to study, and represents an integrated approach to financial support. Pre-vocational and pre-apprenticeship programs such as the New Apprenticeships Access Program have also operated as a safety net to reintegrate early school leavers back into education and training.

A further policy measure introduced to promote young people's retention in the education and training system was the "Finn Targets". In 1991, Ministers set goals for participation and attainment in post-compulsory education and training for the year 2001. The targets specified that 95 per cent of 19 year olds would be completing or have completed Year 12, or would have completed Years 10 or 11 and were currently participating in, or have completed, some form of formally recognised training. For 22 year olds, it was targeted that 60 per cent would be participating in or have completed a qualification at AQF Level 3 or higher.

The current situation

The flexibility of the Australian education system provides individuals with many opportunities to re-enter education and training throughout their lifetime – largely due to a qualifications framework that is clearly defined. The open and coherent nature of the VET system supports people's ability to weave in and out and to build on their education and training experiences as befit lifelong learners.

Yet, for too many people this flexibility has not been realised. Australia is unlikely to meet the Finn target for 19 year olds. Current projections forecast that by 2001 only 85 per cent of 19 year olds will have completed at least Year 12 or equivalent. And yet many experts have argued that the Finn Targets for 19 and 22 year olds were set too low originally when compared internationally.

Many young people are also discontinuing study for financial reasons. In 1997, approximately 25 000 15-24 year olds reported that they had enrolled in, but did not complete, a qualification in the last five years for financial reasons. It seems that financial policies to remove disincentives for study have not been working as efficiently as they should.

Supporting young people

Major initiatives are needed to decrease the chance that young people will drop out of education, and to support their reintegration into education, training or work when they do drop out.

The greatest challenge lies in developing an integrated approach that enables young people to deal with the administrative separation of labour market, training, equity and welfare programs. (Norway, for example, has a "follow-up service" operating at municipal level that integrates youth support services into a coherent package.) Without a concerted approach to prevent young people from permanently leaving the education system we are in danger of creating an ever-increasing group of disadvantaged and socially excluded youths.

A concerted approach will require:

- examination of integrated community-based examples of coordinated support across education and training, labour market, equity and welfare programs, in order to promote successful models;
- documentation of the experiences of early school leavers, including those who have tried to re-enter the system, in order to diagnose areas in which more support is needed, and the development of strategies for contacting non-participants; and
- development of strategies to encourage young people to embrace learning as a way of life.

Current ANTA projects are tackling these two final points with the initiation of research into the experiences of early school leavers, and the development of a segmented marketing strategy based on the findings of the ANTA Marketing Strategy project.

Reintegrating youth at risk

Australia will need to develop an effective process for identifying young people who are most at risk of prematurely leaving the education system. In particular, government initiatives such as Work for the Dole and the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) should be integrated as fully as possible with training opportunities, to maximise the chance that "at risk" youth will be reintegrated into education, training or employment.

To find ways to identify and support those youth at risk of prematurely leaving the education system it will be necessary to:

- ensure that young people have comprehensive and easy access to educational and career information, guidance and counselling (see Feature 6);
- monitor the impact of the Youth Allowance on participation in education; and
- develop strategies to improve the provision of training, services and resources to CDEP communities.

Feature 6.
Information and guidance

The sixth feature identified by the OECD Thematic Review focuses on the need for attractive and accessible information, guidance and follow-up services for all young people that integrates educational, labour market and social counselling. This feature is closely related to the Safety Net issues identified in Feature 5, as guidance and information will be critical for youth making first choices about future directions as well as for those who are wishing to re-enter education, training and the workforce.

Australian policy and structural achievements

While there is an extensive range of careers information and advice, and there are isolated examples of good practice, national structural frameworks for the provision of information or guidance have not yet been developed. Integrated approaches that address the gamut of educational, labour market and social counselling are not currently available. There is also a question as to whether the available information, and the form in which it is presented, is attractive and accessible to a wide range of clients.

Following a report by the MCEETYA Career Education Taskforce on the development of a national on-line career information system, MCEETYA has initiated a scoping study to determine user requirements and demand for this information.

The current situation

More information on careers and educational opportunities is available to clients of the vocational education and training system than ever before. Sources of information include:

- *Ozjac*, a DETYA on-line site enabling young people and adults to find information on available courses and careers;
- *Take-Off!*, an ANTA on-line site explaining the features and benefits of vocational education and training, using the real stories of young people from around Australia; and
- NACs Information Service, an ANTA-funded service for information about New Apprenticeship Pathways available through Training Packages. This service provides a single point of contact, primarily for New Apprenticeship Centres, for information on the range, availability and relevance of Training Packages, including a website, a 1-800 number, and a series of information sessions, visits and resources.

Although there is currently no data on the effectiveness of these sources of information, we know that lack of course information alone is rarely the prime reason for young people not studying. In 1997 only 5% of 15-19 year olds cited lack of information as the reason for non-participation. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that VET in Schools programs are improving the availability of information as school careers advisers make better connections with industry and the local community; however, there is considerable variation between schools.

On the other hand, the graduate destination survey revealed high levels of dissatisfaction with the provision of information on job prospects. Australia is less developed than many other countries in this respect – particularly in terms of consolidated, integrated advice and counselling. An overall lack of

personal, face-to-face services in this area appears to limit opportunities for an integrated, holistic approach to careers guidance. This may, in turn, lessen opportunities for achieving equitable outcomes in vocational education and training.

Providing useful information

It seems that the challenge is not to provide more information on courses, but to make it more accessible and understandable by users, and to develop guidance and follow-up services for all young people that integrate educational, labour market and social counselling. This approach, while it needs to be focussed on young people, would also have the capacity to respond to the needs of other segments of the population, for example, adults seeking to re-enter the workforce and disadvantaged groups.

To develop a more integrated approach to the provision of information, guidance and support services it will be necessary to:

- identify what services students need, how to make these services more attractive and accessible and what would constitute the most effective public policy interventions at national, State and local levels; and
- examine effective examples of integrated approaches to consolidated, integrated advice and counselling in order to develop and promote successful models.

The ANTA Marketing Strategy will address issues identified in the first point based on a segmentation of the attitudes of users.

Feature 7.
Effective institutional frameworks

The OECD has identified the need for effective institutional frameworks in order to achieve policy coherence and effective program implementation. Effective institutional frameworks are required for the organised and continuous involvement of all relevant players at the national, sectoral and local levels, as well as cooperation among them.

Australian policy and structural achievements

Within the VET sector, the establishment of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), with a Ministerial Council and a private-sector Board, and with strong links to national Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs), and State Training Authorities provides the mechanisms for continual involvement and co-operation among all relevant players. However, the division of responsibilities between national bodies, the Commonwealth and State and Territories inevitably results in some slippage between policy development and implementation.

Across education sectors, where different frameworks and, to an extent, different philosophies meet, the differences create challenges for policy coherence.

The current situation

As previously stated, the collective commitment by Australian governments, in partnership with industry, to the development of a coherent framework for policy and programs throughout the VET sector has been achieved through the establishment of the Australian National Training Authority. ANTA's work has resulted in the National Strategy that sets the medium term policy framework and objectives for the sector into the next century.

While there is still no systematic policy coherence between the sectors, particularly from the point of view of users, a number of initiatives are being driven by user demand and the increasing desire of students to move between the sectors. Initiatives in coordinating cross-sectoral approaches to policy and regulation include the AVCC/ANTA credit transfer project, VET in Schools, the MCEETYA Career Education Taskforce project on course and careers information and the adoption by MCEETYA of the National Training Framework.

Better links and structures

Without a strategy that can address all sectors, it is difficult to develop national policy on future demand and growth. It is not realistic to create a post-compulsory education system under a single funding and administrative framework; nor is it necessarily desirable, as it could diminish each sector's distinctive mission. The important priority is to create links and structures between the sectors so that, *from the point of view of learners and enterprises,* there are no barriers to learning or transition.

Feature 8.
Monitoring tools

The final feature identified by the OECD Thematic Review focuses on the importance of well designed monitoring tools, including statistics, indicators and longitudinal surveys, that reflect developments in education and employment systems not in isolation from each other but revealing their interactions.

In order to understand and improve the experiences of young people in their transition from school to working life, measures must be in place to provide information that will enable examination of the effectiveness of current arrangements.

Australian policy and structural achievements

With the current monitoring systems Australia is well positioned to capture information on the education and employment circumstances of the population, and young people in particular. One of the key structures in place to collect such information is the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The ABS collects and reports a range of data and statistics on education and training, economic and employment matters.

In addition to the ABS data, there are a number of other organisations whose work involves the collection and dissemination of a range of high quality education and employment indicators. These include:

- The Australian Council of Education Research – longitudinal data on young people and their experiences in education, training and the labour market;
- The Commonwealth Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) – statistics covering all levels of post-compulsory education and training, often incorporating employment data; and
- The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) – surveys and statistics from the national VET collection with a heavy employment focus.

Another key achievement in the development of monitoring tools in this area is the 1996 agreement by the ANTA Ministerial Council to establish the Performance Review Committee. Concerns had been noted regarding data quality in the VET system and one of the key deliverables of the committee was to provide advice on data to be used in the development of the key performance measures that underpin the National Strategy for VET (1998-2003). These measures incorporate a range of education and employment statistics to monitor the performance of the VET sector.

The current situation

Historically it has been difficult to compare statistics from the three education sectors, due to the different statistical standards that underpin the respective data collections. (For example, it has been difficult to obtain data on VET in Schools that was comparable with other VET data.) To remedy this, the ABS has recently proposed that a National Centre for Education and Training Statistics be established. This idea has received widespread support from education system CEOs.

Better use of data

At the macro level, Australia has developed an impressive set of monitoring tools that will be improved by the establishment of the proposed National Centre for Education and Training Statistics. The proposed model for the Centre will leave sectoral arrangements as they currently are for schools, VET and higher education statistics, with the Centre aiming to better coordinate this work and provide a focus for cross-sectoral issues.

The ABS and other agencies will need to be encouraged to ensure that educational and employment statistics are integrally linked and are not treated as separate areas of interest. With this issue in mind, it has been proposed that the new Centre will continue the survey work of the ABS in the areas of education, training and employment to obtain consistent data across all educational sectors and jurisdictions.

These measures for data collection and comparison will not, however, ensure that the data is used more effectively at the level of industry training bodies and providers, by whom the use of statistics and survey data to inform decision-making is not well advanced. Institutions need to use the data available to them to monitor and evaluate the progress of their students through the education system and into the world of work. Currently this does not happen on a consistent basis across any of the sectors.

To ensure that data is used more effectively than at present, TAFE Institutes and other providers need to be encouraged to use the data and statistical indicators available to them in their day-to-day planning and quality assurance procedures. Data that could be used more effectively for planning purposes includes information on the relative costs of courses and detailed tracking of student outcomes after graduation.

Conclusion

As has been described throughout this Status Report, there are many areas in which Australia can be proud of its achievements toward creating an environment that supports successful transitions from initial education to working life. However, this examination of the current Australian situation against the eight features identified by the OECD indicates that a number of issues have yet to be addressed. The most significant of these remaining issues are:

- development of an effective process for identifying young people who are most at risk of prematurely leaving the education system, and reintegrating those who do leave it; this will require an integrated approach that enables young people to better deal with the administrative separation of labour market, training, equity and welfare programs;
- development of integrated approaches to career guidance that combine educational, labour market and social counselling;
- ensuring that underpinning knowledge, generic competencies and work-readiness skills form the basis of young people's training;
- improving the opportunities for young people to learn in real work settings while they are students, particularly by focusing on levels of employer involvement; and
- taking further steps to ensure that the structures and frameworks now in place serve the interests of both learners and employers.